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Items 2 and 4 of the provisional agenda*

OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT SITUATION AND TRENDS RELATING TO THE TRANSFER OF ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND TECHNOLOGIES

INSTITUTIONAL CAPABILITIES AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

Letter dated 21 January 1994 from the Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the text of the document entitled "Environmental technology centre in Tunisia" (see annex), prepared by Tunisia pursuant to the recommendation of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its first session.

I should be grateful if you would have the enclosed text circulated as an official document of the second session of the Commission on Sustainable Development and of its Inter-sessional Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Technology Transfer and Cooperation.

(Signed) Slaheddine ABDELLAH
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Tunisia
to the United Nations

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Annex

Environmental Technology Centre in Tunisia

Chapter 34 of Agenda 21, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, recommends, in particular, that measures should be taken at the national and international levels to improve the capacity of the developing countries to develop and use environmental techniques by strengthening institutions and information systems. In order to implement that recommendation, the Commission on Sustainable Development at its first session supported "the establishment of environmental technology centres at the international, regional, subregional and national levels, as appropriate, and the strengthening of existing centres. The objective of these centres would be to improve the capacity to promote the development, transfer and application of environmentally sound technologies and corresponding technical know-how with special focus on developing countries' needs, and to foster sustainable development, in particular in developing countries" (E/1993/25/Add.1-E/CN.17/1993/3/Add.1, 30 June 1993, chap. I, para. 48).

Introduction

Avoiding a purely scientific and industrial approach, the environmental technology centre would be a technology centre whose main purpose would be to promote and produce appropriate environmental technologies that combine industrial development research with training.

Thus, the centre will deal with two important issues discussed at international meetings on sustainable development: technology and human resources development.

The emphasis on the development, promotion and production of appropriate technologies, taking into account local conditions, would add new elements to the international discussion that currently stresses accessibility and methods of technology transfer.

Moreover, the Tunisian approach will facilitate cooperation in various areas of development, in particular in the sectors of science and technology and the productive sector, thereby promoting an open system that will have a positive impact on other areas in which technology can be applied.

The establishment of an environmental technology centre in Tunisia would contribute to national capacity-building and would set an example for other developing countries, in particular in Africa and the Arab Mediterranean region.

Objectives and nature of the centre

The first objective of the centre is to serve as a national and regional focal point in Africa and the Arab Mediterranean region and to develop Tunisia's capacity, and subsequently the capacity of other countries of the region, to promote, develop and produce, to the extent possible, appropriate environmental technologies and the know-how required for the effective implementation of environmental and sustainable development programmes.

The second objective is to promote cooperation at the national and international levels to meet the development and environmental challenges facing the region. In order to achieve these objectives, the environmental technology centre will carry out the following activities:

(a) Develop a database on selected environmental technologies of the industrialized and developing countries. The centre will disseminate information to potential users in Tunisia and the African and Arab Mediterranean region;

(b) Establish a training centre to provide, together with universities and other higher educational institutions, expertise in the use of environmental technologies, in keeping with the specific needs of Tunisia and the region. The training centre will deal with key areas of environmental protection, namely:

(i) Water and sanitation;

(ii) Waste management and recycling;

(iii) Protection of the coast;

(iv) Biological conservation and measures to combat desertification;

(c) Promote scientific research that is geared primarily towards applied research. This will be done in close cooperation with, in particular, research institutes and universities in the fields of engineering and technology, and also in the fields of management, business and trade, including the public and private sectors. It should be noted that the centre will provide such services as quality control and technology assessment, as well as other services that promote industrial development. The centre will thus provide training for and promote future environmental specialists;

(d) Provide adequate infrastructure and other means of improving the industrial development of environmental technologies suitable for Tunisia, in keeping with the exigencies of its environment programme and its legislation. Such technology reflects a systematic and concerted effort to produce, to the extent possible, an appropriate technology in keeping with national requirements and the requirements of foreign entrepreneurs and investors; it will foster innovation and create opportunities in other areas where such technology can be applied.

Institutional structures

The establishment of the environmental technology centre requires close cooperation with the various participants in decision-making and the implementation of the project.

The participants include, in particular, the Government, scientific research institutes, the private sector, financial institutions and non-governmental organizations.

The centre will be governed by a board of directors composed of the principal participants and will function as a public industrial and commercial enterprise.

International cooperation

The establishment of the centre requires a conceptual approach that promotes investment and technical assistance. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation will therefore be required to ensure the centre's efficient operation. In particular, it will be necessary to enlist the participation of the industrialized countries and international organizations that already have relations with Tunisia in the field of research, environment and industry:

(a) With regard to the scientific and research objectives and the functions of the centre, cooperation will be established with research

institutes in Tunisia and in the region and with the industrialized countries, thus ensuring North-South, South-South cooperation and "three-way" cooperation;

(b) With regard to the environmental aspect of the project, cooperation will be established with national and regional organizations as well as with United Nations agencies (the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Development Programme), bilateral cooperation with the industrialized countries and so forth;

(c) With regard to cooperation and investment, relations will be established at the national and regional levels with organizations specializing in the promotion of industrial development, with international investment institutions and so forth;

(d) With regard to external financing, relations will be established with such donors as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Investment Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Global Environment Facility and the United Nations Development Programme, as well as with donor countries.

Cost

The cost of implementation will depend on the nature and objectives of the centre. However, the centre will be established in accordance with international criteria, and particular consideration will be given to the technologies to be developed and the future expansion of the centre.

Justification

The primary beneficiary of this project is Tunisia which, through this approach, integrates environmental and economic concerns, scientific and industrial activities and the introduction of new instruments into its domestic policy with a view to developing its capacity for sustainable development. With the assistance of the centre, other countries will also be able to benefit from the centre and adopt a similar approach.

Moreover, the centre will provide a number of services (dissemination of information, training and cooperation in the field of research) that will enable the African and Arab Mediterranean countries to participate and thus benefit directly from the establishment of the centre.